

To the people of Japan: Thank you!

Republic of Niger

Project for Primary School Construction

Completion ceremony (January 22, 1998)

The eyes of the children looking at their new school building, desks, and chairs were shining on this long-awaited day. Around 300 children, teachers, and local residents gathered for the completion ceremony at the primary school constructed in the Gaweye area on the outskirts of Niamey, the capital city, and numerous high-ranking government officials, whom the residents had never seen up close, were greeted with thunderous applause.

The ceremony was attended by six ministers, including Minister of National Education Moumouni, and many officials from each ministry. The line-up of high-ranking government officials was a sign of the enthusiasm of Niger's government to improve basic education, aiming to develop their country. In between the speeches during the ceremony, children, who had ordered same t-shirts for this day, chanted the names of Japan, Niger and the partnership in French. In the second half of the ceremony, they sang their Song of Thanks in Japanese, which they had practiced over and over to directly convey their gratitude for building the school, leading to a loud cheer from the people attending. The ministers and the Japanese ambassador came up to the shy-looking children, who were surprised by the loud clapping, and gave them another round of applause; the venue was filled with an even more friendly atmosphere.

The ceremony was extensively covered by national television and radio, and AFP.

The state of education in Niger was at a critical standard even among developing nations, with an adult literacy rate of around 28% in 1990, and primary level school attendance at 28.5% in FY1993. On the other hand, even though school attendance was high in cities such as the capital, Niamey, the population was dramatically increasing, and it became urgent to relieve overcrowded classes and to rebuild temporary classrooms made of sun-dried bricks and straw thatching.

With Japan's cooperation, 137 classrooms 57 existing primary schools were rebuilt or added in Niamey and nearby departments where toilets were built, and desks and chairs were provided. With these, 11,000 children have been able to attend classes with peace of mind.